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Rachel Price, *The Object of the Atlantic: Concrete Aesthetics in Cuba, Brazil, and Spain, 1868-1968*. Northwestern UP, 2014. 272 pp.

In *The Object of the Atlantic*, Rachel Price develops an historically-rooted theory of “concretude” that takes shape in the Atlantic region between empire and globalization. Through readings of writers such as José Martí, Joaquim de Sousa Andrade, Ramiro de Maeztu, and Brazilian concrete and neoconcrete poets and artists, Price demonstrates how a shared aesthetic interest in concretude alternately mirrors, engages, and anticipates economic shifts from objects to networks. The book’s definition of its central theme is wide-ranging, moving between spectrums that include the endpoints of material and immaterial, presence and absence, “thingly” and virtual. Within these categories is further variety still. Objects are contrasted to networks, processes, dematerialization, and voids, and they are paired with materiality, commodities, products, and the everyday remnants of material culture, among other things. Materiality, in turn, sometimes refers to the fact of these various objects as depicted in writing and other times refers to the materiality of writing itself.

The materiality of writing includes written form, as in Price’s discussion of a “signature use of colons” in Martí’s late-nineteenth-century New York chronicles. Price describes how Martí’s chronicles, a series of newspaper articles written by the Cuban poet while living in New York City, “juggle distant geographies and carefully modulated paces, miming the global operation of capital” (53). She argues that, in these chronicles, frequent and unorthodox use of colons “visually string together far-flung places and times into a delicately connected whole--a concrete diagram” (53). Just as the chronicles “mime” global capital, the colons create a diagram-like effect. Later, Price describes how their “form *enacts* the culture of the stock market:

harried, pitching, linking far and near through the exchange of commodities--made equivalent, as the colons make chunks equivalent” (55; emphasis added). The materiality of writing here is thus a formal and visual strategy that serves to imitate an extratextual material reality.

Later, Price pushes back against a dominant reading of mid-twentieth-century Brazilian concrete poetry that suggests the movement’s aesthetics were straightforwardly reflective of “the euphoric national developmentalism characteristic of the era of President Juscelino Kubitschek” (166). Instead, Price shows that what concrete poets Décio Pignatari, Augusto de Campos, and Haroldo de Campos called “‘ultimate’ or ‘total’ realism” had specifically to do with “a desire to make word equal thing” (167). Here, she argues that the materiality of writing is not a visual and formal “representation of external reality but reality itself” (167) and makes the case for prescient links between concrete poetry and the coming rise of “a more networked, more virtual, and more extensive capitalism” (21). Though the neoconcrete movement that formed in (somewhat antagonistic) response to concrete poetry and art accused concrete poetry of “a naïve fidelity to a scientific objectivity that conflated antilyrical anti-expressionism with a fetishizing of objecthood,” Price argues that concrete poetry already showed an interest in the pairing of the material and immaterial that would predate later moves away from the objectual and toward the processual in neoconcretism as well as in the *poema/processo* movement that coincided with the dawning digital age.

A careful revealing of this type of insight--one in which literature anticipates coming aesthetic and political-economic shifts--is one of *The Object of the Atlantic*’s strongest claims. And the book’s meticulous, historical exploration of transatlantic networks of power juxtaposed with close readings of the region’s aesthetic output helpfully reveals further ways aesthetic concretude relates to extraaesthetic reality. One example would be Price’s address of the complex

relationship between Spain and Latin America as it engages questions of objecthood and subjecthood at turn of the twentieth century. Resisting the persistent divide between Latin American and Penninsular studies, her discussion of Spanish critic and theorist Ramiro de Maeztu shows how Cuba's "independence (or loss) is but one event in a dense web of multiple, interrelated movements throughout the Atlantic world" (109). By examining Maeztu's writings during the period, Price shows an important link between an aesthetic interest in a thing-centered concretude and the politics of abolition and Cuban independence as received in Spain. Describing Maeztu's writings against what he terms "personality" (or subjectivity) Price shows that "*aesthetically* he rejects personality in favor of things and objectivism. *Politically* he rejects claims to sovereignty or emancipation in favor of suprasubjective systems of control" (128; emphasis original). Though at times couched as an aesthetic theory, Price shows that what Maeztu sees as "sovereignty's emptiness becomes an excuse for denying it to past and present colonized peoples" (131). If writing's materiality is elsewhere shown to either mimic or equate itself with what Price calls "external reality" (167), here Maeztu's aesthetic interest in things is shown to justify a theoretical stance that favors the real maintenance of oppression in postcolonial Cuba and postimperial Spain.

Throughout *The Object of the Atlantic*, Price details the intricate political and aesthetic connections within the Iberian Atlantic, a space that, though the book focuses on Cuba, Brazil, and Spain, also includes the United States. She recounts, for example, how Augusto and Haroldo de Campos revisited and reinterpreted the late-nineteenth-century Brazilian poet Joaquim de Sousândrade, who, like Martí, spent time in New York City. Price points out that in addition to Sousândrade's "media inspired poetics of material language" (83), the poet, similarly to Martí, "renders figures from New York City as types or allegorical figures animated by a culture of

speculation” (88). While the concrete poets see in Sousândrade a “proto-concrete writing” (77), Price also reveals his perceptive anticipation of the coming restructuring of global capital, something that is shared with his Cuban contemporary and linked to the time the two writers spent in New York.

Though Price suggests in the introduction that current debates in the areas of object-oriented ontology and new materialisms are akin to her study of concretude, explicit connections with these contemporary fields of inquiry are minimal in the individual chapters that follow. Nevertheless, *The Object of the Atlantic* responds to a critique of these approaches--especially of object-oriented ontology--as being insufficiently political by demonstrating that a study of concretude is expressly entangled with politics. She also hints at, if not overtly, further theoretical connections between new and historical materialisms. For example, in returning to Martí’s legacy in 1920s and 30s Cuba, Price details the relationship between “objects, relics, and products” that “hint at [Cuba’s] dependent status” (134) and uses these objects (and their immaterial and spectral others) to complicate what she describes as “an enduring, though reductive, narrative that the island had merely passed from Spanish colony to U.S. neocolony, from formal to economic dependence” (133-34).

These theoretical connections--ones that address the relationship between contemporary philosophies of objects and other theories of matter, things, and materialism circulating in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and Iberian aesthetic thought--present opportunities for future research. Likewise, though here it is sometimes difficult to track the extremely varied meanings of what Price gathers under the umbrella of “concretude,” revealing this complexity is one of *The Object of the Atlantic*’s major contributions to what promises to be a rich set of future scholarly inquiries into the many objects of the Atlantic.

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